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ABSTRACT

In the wake of negative publicity about American higher education and public knowledge of measuring student outcomes, a study was done of the importance of regional accreditaiton as perceived by college presidents. Focus of the study was on the relationship of interpersonal values to each president's view of accreditation. Using the Likert Scale and the Survey of Interpersonal Values to measure the attitudes toward accreditation and interpersonal values, presidents from 582 two- and four-year institutions, both accredited and non-accredited, were surveyed. All schools were within the geographic region of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Results of the study suggested that the majority of the 139 (60%) of the college presidents who responded viewed accreditation as "important" to "very important" to the future, with only 14.4 percent calling accreditation "very important." This would seem to be significant for the success of accreditation because the president guides the institutional philosophy and incorporates his past experiences with his or her vision of the institution's future. Presidents also contribute to the success of the process through attitude and personality characteristics but, as the results indicated, not necessarily through their interpersonal values. Included are three tables and five references. (JB)

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College Presidents' Attitudes Toward the Importance of Regional Accreditation

Although the duties of the college president include direct attention to matters regarding accreditation, the literature rarely mentions the specific actions required by the president in this role. Studies describing the role of the college president in a college or university have noted that one of their most important responsibilities was articulation of the vision of the institution. The college president can articulate the vision of accreditation in a manner that promotes clear expectations to all personnel involved in its efforts.

The regional accreditation process emphasizes accountability by leaders in higher education. This has initiated a new urgency to document educational results of programs that were touted in the reports of the 1980s as being of low quality. Outcomes evaluation, or assessment, has become an overriding theme in higher education, and accrediting bodies are emphasizing these topics in examinations of institutions (Waggener, Southerland, and Leonard, 1990). At a time of negative publicity about American higher education and public knowledge of measuring student outcomes, investigation into the importance of regional accreditation as perceived by college presidents seemed warranted. A Likert Scale was used to measure the attitudes toward accreditation, and college presidents' interpersonal

values were surveyed to determine the impact of these values on the process of accreditation. The relationship of the importance of accreditation to interpersonal values was studied.

Methodology

The population for this study consisted of 582 two-and four-year institutions, accredited and non-accredited, within the geographical region of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Using a stratified random sampling technique, 110 accredited two-year institutions, 52 accredited four-year institutions, 54 non-accredited two-year institutions, and 33 non-accredited four-year institutions were selected to be surveyed.

On a Likert Scale of 1 to 5, college presidents were asked to indicate the degree of importance anticipated for SACS accreditation in the future. The value of 1 received the degree of "very unimportant", 2 was listed as "unimportant", 3 as "average", 4 as "important", and 5 as "very important".

The Survey of Interpersonal Values (Gordon, 1976) and a basic questionnaire consisting of the Likert Scale item were mailed to college presidents of selected institutions. The survey measured six factored interpersonal value dimensions of (1) support - being treated with understanding, receiving encouragement from other people, being treated with kindness and considerations, (2) conformity - doing what is socially correct, following regulations closely, doing what is accepted and proper,

being a conformist, (3) recognition - being looked up to and admired, being considered important, attracting favorable notice, achieving recognition, (4) independence - having the right to do whatever one wants to do, being free to make one's own decisions, being able to do things in one's own way, (5) benevolence - doing things for other people, sharing with others, helping the unfortunate, being generous, and (6) leadership - being in charge of other people, having authority over others, being in a position of leadership or power (Gordon, 1976). The value dimensions, or "objects" of value were social-psychological states which the respondent viewed as important. The test-retest reliability coefficients ranged from .79 to .89 for the scores. The Kuder-Richardson reliability results ranged from .71 to .86; median estimate was r=.82 (Robinson, 1970).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive data were used to interpret the number of responses from accredited institutions and the Likert Scale of the degrees of importance of accreditation. Table 1 showed the breakdown of institutions according to accreditation in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. There were 109, or 82.6% of the institutions of the total population that were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools which responded to the study. Only 23%, or 17.4 institutions in the total population that responded were not accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Table 1.

Number of Institutions Indicating Accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Category	# Inst	Percent
Accredited by SACS	109	82.6
Not accredited by SACS	23	17.4
Total	132	100.0

Table 2 indicates responses to the degree of importance that respondents attached to accreditation in the future by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Half of the respondents indicated that accreditation would be very important in the future, while 14.4% indicated that accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools would be very unimportant.

Table 2

Number of Institutions Indicating Degree of Importance Anticipated for SACS Accreditation in the Future.

Category	# Inst	Percent
Very Unimportant	19	14.4
Unimportant	5	3.8
Average	8	6.1
Important	34	25.8
Very Important	66	50.0
Total	132	100.0

Multiple Linear Regression analysis was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between college presidents' personal values and accreditation. The personal values were examined in relationship to institutional characteristics. Table 3 showed that the level of significance was more than .05 on each of the six factors of personal values.

Table 3

The Relationship Between Social-Psychological Factors While Holding Constant the Institutional Characteristics.

Factor Tested	Full Model R Square	Reduced Model R Square	RSQ Change	df	F	p
Zero Model	.410	0	.410	13, 121	6.5	.00
Support		.406	.004	1, 121	.91	.34
Conformity		.409	.001	1, 121	.30	.58
Recognition		.410	.000	1, 121	.01	.94
Independence		.409	.001	1, 121	.24	.62
Benevolence		.409	.001	1, 121	.26	.61
Leadership		.409	.001	1, 121	.18	.68

Of the sixty percent (139) of the college presidents who responded to the study, fifty percent of the respondents indicated that accreditation would be very important in the future. However, their own personal values were not influential factors in determining whether or not institutions were affiliated with regional accreditation ($p>.05$).

Results of the study suggested that the majority of the college presidents who responded viewed accreditation as "important" to "very important" to the future. The impact of the effectiveness of the self-study process for accreditation is largely dependent upon the quality of leadership of the president. The president guides the institutional philosophy in incorporating his past experiences with his vision of the institution's future (Waggener, 1990). The college president, the foremost representative in matters regarding accreditation, contributes to the success of the process by his attitude and personality characteristics, but not necessarily by his interpersonal values. Suggestions to presidents to focus on to strengthen accreditation include keeping peer review as a standard procedure, supporting the agencies' recommendations for institutional improvement, avoiding selective use of program results, and maintaining a positive attitude toward the self-study process normally included in accreditation reviews.

Regional accreditation will continue to be important to college presidents by recognizing that institutions are individual and unique. Leaders in higher education will continue to assess the quality of their institutional programs. In this way, the public can be assured that college presidents are committed to institutional involvement and improvement by recognizing the importance of regional accreditation.

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